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From: Hutchinson, Marcella
Sent: Fri 8/7/2015 3:09:33 PM
Subject: FW: [West Slope] San Juan County spill highlights years of Colorado cleanup effort

FYI –No mention of nonpoint source specifically, but this watershed was a long-time focus for Colorado's NPS Program and an early adopter of the watershed approach as a means of addressing the impacts of historic mining.

From: west-slope@googlegroups.com [mailto:west-slope@googlegroups.com] **On Behalf Of**
Loretta Lohman
Sent: Thursday, August 06, 2015 5:56 PM
To: west-slope@googlegroups.com; WQ-news@googlegroups.com
Subject: [West Slope] San Juan County spill highlights years of Colorado cleanup effort

THE DENVER POST

San Juan County spill highlights years of Colorado cleanup effort

Federal, state officials say cleaning up Colorado mines has been priority for years

By Jesse Paul and Bruce Finley
The Denver Post

Posted: 08/06/2015 04:23:48 PM MDT [Add a Comment](#) | Updated: 31 min. ago



Water in the Animas River just south of C.R. 252 shortly before 1 p.m., Thursday, August 6, 2015. (Photo courtesy Magelight Media)

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Environmental officials have been working for years to clear toxic metals and acidic water from Colorado's roughly 22,000 abandoned mines.

The difficulty of that effort was clear Wednesday when the Environmental Protection Agency [accidentally released a 1 million-gallon flow of wastewater](#) into a watershed targeted over the past several decades for cleanup.

The Bureau of Land Management had even highlighted the Animas River as [one of three environmental priority areas in Colorado affected by mine waste](#).

The Gold King Mine, the source of the spill, has been eyed for clean up by environmentalists and

federal and state officials since at least 2005. The EPA was at the site Wednesday with heavy machinery when the spill occurred. The mine's owners say a plug failed.

"The great news is that modern mining does not allow the release of these waters," said Elizabeth Holley, assistant professor of mining engineering at the Colorado School of Mines. "The bad news is we owe our statehood to mining prior to any environmental regulations."

Until 1977, mining laws in Colorado were minimal, said Ginny Brannon, director of the Colorado Division of Reclamation Mining and Safety.

"Folks could go out and do what they want and walk away from the sites, and this is one of them," Brannon said Thursday. "The main concern from my perspective is continuing to restore and safeguard these old, turn-of-the-century mines so that public health and safety and wildlife are protected."

Scientists say Colorado's mineral-rich mountains were shedding toxic metals and acids long before prospectors began digging for profit, but that mining can speed up that process.

Holley said Cement Creek, where the Gold King spill happened, was deemed undrinkable in 1876, long before mining had become widespread in the area.

"This is sort of a punctuated release of water, which is unfortunate," Holley said. "But this watershed has had major acid rock drainage for a century."

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